DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 284 218 CS 210 572

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TITLE Media Directors Help Plan a Media Course.
PUB DATE Aug 87
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of The Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (70th, San Antonio, TX, August 1-4, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Advertising; Computer Software; *Curriculum Development; *Curriculum Research; Job Skills; Marketing; Mass Media; Media Research; Persuasive Discourse; Theory Practice Relationship; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS Advertising Agencies; Marquette University WI

ABSTRACT

In an effort to plan a more useful media course for advertising majors at Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a survey was conducted, along with a series of informal interviews, of media directors with large and small advertising firms. The five participating directors completed broad questionnaires on which they rated on a five-point scale descriptions of topics and exercises that had been used in a previous media course, and topics and exercises that were being considered for use. Results suggested that there was a broad consensus as to the importance of several items, including knowledge of basic terms of advertising; familiarity with computers, word processing programs, and spread sheet programs; knowledge of inter-media comparisons; and understanding of the way marketing strategy and creative strategy affect media planning. Similarly, most agreed that understanding agency compensation and psychographic comparison of vehicles was not particularly important. Small firms and large firms disagreed on the importance of knowing the specifics of CDI's and BDI's, and the least definite set of answers came from the question on direct marketing. When asked whether anything else was important for advertising students to learn, all five directors agreed that good writing skills are extremely important, and some suggested that an understanding of statistics and negotiation tactics is helpful. (JC)

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MEDIA DIRECTORS

HELP PLAN A MEDIA COURSE

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MEDIA DIRECTORS

HELP PLAN A MEDIA COURSE

The idea for this project began as I was explaining to my media class what they could expect in their comprehensive final exam.

"I'm going to put myself in the shoes of a media director," I heard myself saying, "and I'm going to ask you things I think you ought to know as an advertising major applying for an entry level job."

Later I started to think about that. Maybe I should get a second opinion, maybe even a third or a fourth. Yes, I had been a professional for many years and I had a fair idea what a professional media director would be looking for. One of the hats I wore when I owned my own small agency certainly had MEDIA DIRECTOR embroidered on the front. But I never concentrated on media. And it's been a while. What's going on out there <u>now</u>?

I decided to find out. No, it wouldn't be in time for the test that started my inquiries but it would be in time for the next one. More important, it would be in time to plan for the next round of the course. Also, I was sure my findings would be valuable to many others who teach media courses.

Selection of a methodology came easy. What I was doing was exploratory. I couldn't count votes on clearly defined issues. I needed to get comments and opinions. I needed to do personal,

in-depth interviews with a cross section of media directors from different size agencies handling a variety of accounts. I made some contacts and ran into what I have always found when I ask professionals to share their expertise with an educational program--willing, even eager cooperation.

These are the people who participated:

Gary Titterington of Frankenberry, Laughlin & Constable, a 60 person agency with a media department of 12.

Pat McDonough of Hoffman, York & Compton, 65 people, 8 in media.

Donald Pom of Cramer Krasselt, 140 people, 24 in media.

Bill Hadlock, Judy Zyroff and Bob Kirkpatrick of Leo Burnett, 1500 people, 290 in media.

Deborah Donaldson, of Boelter & Lincoln, 15 people, 2 in media.

I went to each person (in Burnett's case, group of persons) with a questionnaire that had a broad general description of topics and exercises I had covered or done in my class, topics and exercises from the text books I use (1) and topics and exercises I had considered as possibilities. I asked each to rate the topic or exercise on a scale of 5 ranging from the highest, "almost essential," to the lowest, "not important." I tried to encourage comments and reasons more than ratings. The final questions was completely open ended asking simply, "Is there anything else you think is important?"

I found the questionnaire served well as a conversation starter and an organizer. The rating system provided a way to compare answers and give a rough view of aggregate opinion.

However, I won't report any numerical values because I don't even want to hint this is a quantitative study.

There was obvious agreement on several items. For one, these media directors expected students in advertising courses to know the basic terms of the business, "rating, share, HUT, CPM, ADI, coverage, circulation, etc." Seven out of eight put it in the "almost essential" category and one ammended that phrase to "absolutely essential."

Titterington said, "On my priority list, that's number one. You ought to have those things down cold."

Donaldson said she wanted them to have more than a "textbook definition. They should be able to explain it to...a less sophisticated client."

Kirkpatrick made it clear Burnett might hire an English major who didn't know the terms of the business but said, "We can't imagine hiring someone coming out of an advertising class who didn't know that."

Similarly, all expected advertising students to understand traditional reach and frequency, not just the terms but the concepts and relationships. "That's basic," several commented. McDonough was not quite as enthusiastic although he still said it was moderately important. He wanted to be sure students understood the concept but he said, "How we specifically use it or determine it, we will teach that ourselves."

Effective reach and frequency scored a bit lower. Everyone wanted students to know about it but there seemed to be a fear we would overemphasize it, particularly that we might give students an impression there could be a pat answer to the question, "How

many times is enough?"

"It all depends on the product," Pom said. "Give away $100 bills and one spot will give you more takers than you know what to do with."

Donaldson gave it the highest rating because it's the current thing. But she said, "Warn students not to get locked into numbers." She pointed out the need to take creative strategy and execution into account. "If the creative concept is outstanding you may not need all that frequency," she said.

Titterington said, "People coming in need an appreciation for it but they will not have the judgemental ability to implement it."

McDonough wanted them to "know what it's about...get the background into the theory and research that went into developing effective frequency." He pointed out his agency doesn't use effective reach and frequency the same way for every client.

In the group at Burnett, Zyroff wanted students to "understand the concept and be exposed to the literature, the various points of view." Kirkpatrick said, "The concept underlying effective reach and frequency is very worthwile." Hadlock added, "It has to be taught on the basis there is not general agreement on what is effective frequency."

But there was general agreement among the seven people interviewed for this study on at least one other point, the need for general computer knowledge and familiarity. Next to the knowledge of basic terms, that got the highest scores.

Titterington put it this way. "You've got to be computer friendly."

McDonough said, "They ought to feel comfortable and they ought to be able to operate a spread sheet program."

Others agreed that word processing was a start but an ability to use spread sheets was what they were really looking for. Several specifically mentioned Lotus 1,2,3.

Pom expressed the idea that in today's media work "it's important a person think of his job in relation to what a computer can do for it."

Hadlock said five years or even two years ago he would have given the subject a much lower score but things have changed rapidly.

Kirpatrick said agencies don't have time to teach it. "If they come in with that skill they're going to be able to contribute a lot more quickly."

Donaldson had one note of caution. Very important, she agreed, "but don't forget how to do it by hand."

The scores fell drastically when it came to familiarizing students with any specific media models or media planning or buying programs. The reason was basically the same, agencies use so many different ones.

McDonough summed up the general feeling. "They shouldn't have to walk in the door and sit down and use one."

But Titterington said, "It would be nice (if they could) sit down and ask the right questions."

Intermedia comparisons was another topic all participants gave high scores.

"That's a basic," said Titterington.

McDonough wanted to make sure the subject was taught on a

qualitative rather than a quantitative basis. "We're taught that media is mostly mathematics," he said, "and, as you know, with mathematics you come up with one right answer. I happen to believe there are a lot of right answers."

The group at Burnett acknowledged the importance of this very basic decision. "In the real world," Kirkpatrick said, "that's a 7." (My scale, remember, was to 5.) But he added, "In a class, it can't be because every situation is different." Hadlock said, "I don't know any rules. Going through the advantages and disadvantages (of each media form) is worthwile."

Another topic high on the media directors' priority list was the way marketing strategy and creative strategy affect media planning.

"Essential," said McDonough.

The Burnett group agreed unanimously.

"Very important," according to Pom. "You don't want to operate in a vacuum."

"If you're not aware of those you can't do anything," was the way Donaldson put it.

At the other end of the spectrum, most gave low scores to two items. One was agency compensation. An exception was McDonough who explained, "When I worked for big shops it was the furthest thing from my mind. Now, working in management, I'd like to see every employee understand the importance of agency compensation and how they can contribute. They should know there are different systems and how to calculate on the different systems." Others also mentioned students should know the difference between net and gross prices.

The other generally low score when to psychographic comparison of vehicles. Most agreed you could define your target psycographically but, as Titterington put it, that "doesn't translate to the selection process."

On other points there were a variety of opinions. Everybody thought the subject of survey techniques was at least moderately important. Pom gave it the highest rating saying, "You really have to know methodologies and the pros and cons of each." Donaldson agreed saying, "Since you're dealing with numbers you should know how numbers can lie."

Understanding indexing also got a few high scores. At Burnett everyone agreed with Hadlock who said, "I assume that would be in a beginning statistics class, but it's essential." McDonough, however, didn't think so. "Indexing is simply a mathematical formula. We'll teach that to them."

An even wider variety of opinion showed up on the subject of weighting. At Burnett, Zyroff said, "It's important they understand the principle." Pom pointed out that you're dealing with such imperfect information, weighting can only compound those imperfections. McDonough again thought it was something he'd just as soon have them learn at the agency.

When it came to studying the specifics of CDI's and BDI's or dollar weighting and impression weighting of makets the range of opinions got still wider. Titterington called CDI's and BDI's basic terms. "Know them cold," he said. McDonough, on the other hand, didn't even think they should be taught.

At the biggest agency Hadlock gave a high rating to CDI's and BDI's. "Whether they learn about them in your class or they

learn about them here they've got to learn about them," he said. But he gave a low rating to weighting markets because "different agencies are going to do that differently."

At the smallest agency Donaldson said, "We don't use them here. It's not a matter so much we're a smaller agency but it's the type of clients we have. We don't have a Hunt's Tomato Sauce."

Here are some other topics that received a variety of ratings with some representative comments about each:

<u>How to make quantitative vehicle comparisons.</u>

McDonough: "They're going to have to understand at some point they have to sit down with a rating book and decide whether to buy 'Mash' or 'Hill Street Blues,'(but) by teaching them how in college you tend to teach them there is only one way."

Kirkpatrick: "That's getting into the buying issue. They ought to know about buying."

Donaldson: "The first round is the mathematical comparisons."

<u>Qualitative comparisons of vehicles.</u>

Pom: "Somewhat important. It depends on what your product is."

McDonough: "Very important. I like to see them think qualitatively when they come into the job."

Kirkpatrick: "In certain situations it may be worthwile. In others, worthless."

<u>Product use comparisons.</u>

Hadlock: "They should understand the concept."

Pom: "That's something we use a lot."

McDonough: "The theory is very important but not actual applications."

Finding and evaluating competitive data.

McDonough: "That's usually the first thing we teach them. But, again, I don't want them to think there's only one way."

Pom: "They should know there are services such as BAR and LNA. They should know they're not playing by themselves."

Zyroff: "Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the sources and how to use competitive information."

Donaldson: "Important. Not only where to get it but what's wrong with it."

Factors that affect costs such as quarter of the year and day parts.

Titterington: "This is something you learn based on doing it."

Pom: "They should know it's supply and demand."

Kirkpatrick. "Supply and demand is a 5."

Actual practice in using rating books, rate cards, Standard Rate and Data and other sources to figure costs and CPM's.

Titterington: "They should know generally what's in the book but not have to deal with it a whole lot. It's easier taught on the job."

McDonough: "Considering that's the first job most of them are going to be doing--that and competitive searches--I guess it's important."

Pom: "It's important enough to do."

Hadlock: "It's important they understand how to do it. It's not so important they spend a great deal of time doing it."

Ways that clients set budgets.

Hadlock: "It's a nice thing for them to know but it isn't necessary."

Not suprisingly, when it came to test marketing and media translations people with experience at large agencies gave higher scores than those at smaller ones. Kirkpatrick said, "I'm strongly involved in testing," and rated it very important. But he admitted, "I bet there are some accounts that have almost no need for it."

Confirming his thought, Donaldson said, "We don't do it that much. Nobody wants to waste the money."

As far as testing media plans themselves even the large agency people agreed it was too expensive and didn't tell you much.

Probably the least definite set of answers came out of the question on direct marketing. When asked about learning the direct marketer's special techniques for choosing and evaluating media there was usually a hesitation and then an admission of little knowledge. "We have a direct marketing department that takes care of that," was a typical response.

At Burnett, which claims to have a "seamless" direct marketing department (2) they were concerned about it. "The world is moving that way," Hadlock said. "I think it's going to be more important than it is now."

The second to last question was about doing media plans. Donald Jugenheimer's 1976 survey (3) showed this is an important part of most media courses. Some of the pros agreed it should be. Some weren't so sure.

Donaldson said, "I think it ties up the whole class." She thought it important students present their reasons and decisions clearly. "They don't necessarily have to get into the buy," she said.

At Burnett, Zyroff echoed that thought. "The important thing is the concepts more than the actual numbers--thinking it through and putting it together in a logical fashion."

You could give them numbers that are all wrong and it wouldn't matter," Kirkpatrick added.

Hadlock wanted to make sure students got involved in media plans in their campaigns course. It was important for a degree in advertising, he thought, not necessarily for completion of a media course.

Titterington thought a big, national media plan was an ambitious goal. They need to know the process really well," he said, "but to marry the process with the plan you have to know all this other stuff." He preferred giving them multiple simple cases to show them "there are a lot of different things you have to bring into play in different circumstances."

Pom said, "The problem is they don't have the tools. It's not real world."

McDonough said it was important students write media objectives and strategies. "But to have a flow chart and show schedules and calculate reach and frequency, I don't think so."

In the array of answers to my final, open ended inquiry, one point stood out. It struck me with particular impact because so many of my students seem to approach media as applied statistics.

Here's the urgent message, loud and clear from professional media directors to students: PLEASE MAKE SURE YOU LEARN HOW TO WRITE.

McDonough was probably the most vocal on the subject. "Students come out of schools and maybe they can figure a CPM or do a quintile analysis or even create a media allocation model. But let them sit down and write something to justify what they're doing! It's almost sad."

Donaldson had a stronger word than "sad." "It's pitiful," she said.

Hadlock put the matter into a very practical perspective. "People have been fired from here because they couldn't write," he said.

Here are other points that came up:

Titterington: Some other courses are important, research and statistics in particular. They should learn something about the art of negotiation.

McDonough: Don't teach as though everthing advertised is packaged goods. Deal with automobile advertising, computers and at least a little bit of business to business. And he wanted to make sure we let them know, "Media is an art, not a science."

Pom: Courses should contain more about careers in media. "It's a career for a lot of people, not necessarily a stepping stone."

Hadlock: You need to deal with technical things to get at the issues but be sure to emphasize objectives and strategies because that's really what media is all about.

Kirkpatrick: Learn the art of compromise. Not just compromise in the negotiation process but compromising with

fellow workers and clients.

Donaldson: In a small agency you have to know terms used in other departments, particularly production terms. Refine people skills, for instance, "how to nag without being annoying." Emphasize deadlines. "Our whole life is deadlines."

I hope all this has sparked some ideas about making media course a little better. For myself, I know I'm going to work out some kind of a tutorial in our computerized writing lab where I pull out the word processing programs, put in spread sheets and show students how to play "What If?" in different media situations.

I'm going to emphasize with renewed vigor our college policy that all papers and presentations, not only in writing courses but in every course, conform to professional standards of lucidity, coherence, grammar, spelling and punctuation.

And I'm certainly going to have a whole new collection of quotations from the real world to punch up my lectures. For instance, when I give them my opening pep talk on the importance of understanding the language of media I'm sure the comment by Bob Kirkpatrick of Leo Burnett will pack a wallop.

"We can't imagine hiring someone coming out of an advertising class who didn't know that."

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1 Jack Z. Sissors and Jim Surmanek, Advertising Media Planning, 2/e (Chicago: Crain Books, 1982).

Robert W. Hall, Media Math (Lincolnwood, IL: NTC Business Books, 1987).

2 theBurnettwork 5:6-7 (January/February 1987).

3 Approaches to the Teaching of Advertising Media, Proceedings of the AEJ Advertising Division (University of Maryland Convention, 1976)